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# Organization and quality in school education

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## Abstract

The different approaches of analysis in the educational institution lead to a fundamental question: how can the school face the continuing challenges of social and economic framework? The interaction among educational institution and the territory can be effective if the school analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the organizational solution adopted, reduces communication barriers between it and other organizations or the working world, improves internal quality and develops training plans coherent with the context needs.

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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the quality criteria as part of the learning process, lines of action and organization of the schools, the relationship of the same with the outside world, the working world and community of reference. This consideration that the quality of an organizational solution is related to the ability to be up to date, even with the challenges of the operating context of the same organization (La Rosa, 2002).

The changes that have affected the education world up to now are an important step to initiate a review process of educational institutions function, seeking to pursue certain objectives such as:

- improve the training of teachers and trainers in the knowledge that the preparation of teachers is a key factor for educational quality improvement;

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- strengthen links between the education/training systems and the labor market, with particular emphasis on the orientation;
- promote learning more specific only towards the need to reduce the dropout phenomenon;
- encourage studies to enhance professional profiles related to economic sectors in the rapid development with significant employment opportunities;
- greater use of information and communication technologies as teaching and learning tools from the earliest levels of study (Biondi, 2008);
- enhance the learning of foreign languages.

Other ways, however, must be made in the direction of a careful analysis of the organization and quality improvement that puts the focus of the students' needs (Jenkins, 2006).

In recent years the school has been forced to take on new roles, set new goals, outline new methods of action as a result of the changes generated by problems that society is going through. Against this background, it is essential to develop a school, where, through the development of all internal professional resources, it is proposed to pursue its objectives with the maximum efficiency and effectiveness (Early, Maxwell et al., 2007). The quality, in this context, is presented as the necessary condition for implementing the educational renewal.

## 2. Organizational analysis

Analyze the school as an organization is a necessary step for an effective change process. In fact, today more than yesterday, in addition to teaching skills, the school requires organizational and managerial skills to be able to move in a different way than in the past (Dei, 2007).

First it's necessary to think about school as an organization providing services and with a strong professional value. In the knowledge that there are not "excellent" organizational solutions defined in advance. So it is necessary to analyze its organizational reality, its strengths and weaknesses in order to think about the most appropriate interventions to be carried out. In this context, a self-evaluation process may be the beginning of a path of improvement. The aim is precisely to identify its positive aspects (skills possessed, subject of breadth of teaching, etc.) and its critical areas (limits in staff and space availability, resistance to change, etc.) that may become areas that need work. Similarly it can evaluate threats (limited available resources against the need to make investments, economic system trends, etc.) and external opportunities (possibility of making agreements, contacts with other organizations, etc.). This can lead to critically rethink the methodological approaches used and make innovative renewed decisions.

The organizational analysis considers the educational offer as the result of a consistent set of processes that need to be properly planned, governed and controlled in order to ensure the quality and reliability of the same (Bombelli, 2001). The identification of these processes in an educational institution allows it to ensure effective development and control, to reduce the causes of inefficiency and to have more positive visibility in the territory in which it operates (Butera, Coppola, Fasulo, & Nunziata, 2002).

On this basis, it must then initiate an accurate reflection phase on some critical issues such as:

- the awareness of being part of an organization that wants to change, innovate and require everyone, a special contribution;
- the importance of the institution, in the full freedom to teach, to establish specific targets and identify control indicators that define the achievement of these objectives;
- diverse courses offered to ask what are the foundations on which to build a position of advantage over other "competitors" in the area;
- assess the efforts put in place to communicate outside its initiatives and competence levels, in the knowledge that a lack of attention to communication and external relations cannot better its work;
- consider the activities that can be carried out in partnership with other entities outside the institution, looking for those who, based on their specific skills, are able to give the best contribution to the pursuit of quality improvement;

- carefully evaluate the possible cultural resistance to change and the risk of de-motivation, through a review of human resources management; considering the continuing need to manage periods of change with the aims of improving quality of the education offer, streamline the procedural aspects (simplification), reduce waste and inefficiencies;
- consider the most appropriate ways of sharing and involvement: in fact, those who work directly may know better than others the different issues and, therefore, report problems and suggest improvements.

Those mentioned are just a few facets of the organizational problem in an educational institution, but in any case they could introduce the delicate issue of quality improvement.

### **3. The quality in educational institutions**

The quality issues arise in the industrial world and after they are imposed on the service sector. This trend has also affected education services but it would be risky to think of a mechanical transfer of quality concepts and methodologies, without carefully evaluating the education system specifics.

How can the quality change a field like school? What changes are possible?

There are no good answers (in general), as it will be necessary to study the possibility of intervention with respect to the peculiarities of each individual school and initiatives already in place.

It can be risky to get quality starting from the imitation "success" experiences, because what works in one context does not fit in another; in case of, the experience of another institution can become an opportunity to reflect on their own situation.

In any case, the quality is presented as a condition for implementing the school renewal in a gradual manner, also according to European Union indications (Westerheijden, Stensaker, & Rosa, 2007).

The importance of this element justifies the opportunity to talk about a quality project that develops through different stages or levels that constitute the various steps to be taken. Each stage or level has its objectives in order to recall the next level with the guaranteed presence of skills and resources needed.

Regarding a quality project in a school situation, at various levels of education, means promoting a new way of teaching, through enhancement of all professional resources, it is proposed to pursue, with the greatest possible efficiency and effectiveness, its objectives; this through the development of concrete action plans to translate into results clearly identifiable and measurable (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011).

It seems important to perceive quality improvement as a challenging course that requires resources, determination and involvement of people who make a contribution to the school. Every day consistently to all of its activities, it tries to exploit all the resources available to improve the quality of supply, reducing at the same time, the non-quality factors.

If the institutions concerned follow this path, they can get out of a kind of self-referentiality and to have a better perception of the needs of students, to enable a range of initiatives and projects to qualify for training services, develop a more systematic analysis of effectiveness and efficiency of its activities through the definition of improvement interventions.

Everything in the knowledge of what the labor market requires of young people who wish to join in the same: a solid store of knowledge, a good ability to achieve interpersonal relationships, communicate, learn continuously, reprocess and use the knowledge they possess. A fundamental task of schools is to provide an adequate basic knowledge on the subjects of their respective fields of study, and this reinforced, especially for the more technical fields, with practical applications for the subject of study, preparing the student to a sort of greater pragmatism. To the extent that this goal is pursued, the young person will be better prepared for the world of work, valuing the indicated basic preparation. This could encourage greater levels of youth employment, providing a contribution to give concrete answers to one of the most important problems in recent years. In the delicate relationship between school and work seems increasingly in need of programs, methodologies, tools (practical activities, internships, etc.) that combine cultural preparation and a pragmatism that should be present from the earliest school experiences up to the highest levels of education, in order to enrich the professional profile of the person concerned (Pedder & Opfer,

2013). This could lead to a double positive effect: on the one hand, support the young in job searching and promote an constant desire to learn (both as a skill and as a habit); on the other hand, create conditions to allow the recruitment of a young person in a company that can provide a contribution in terms of knowledge. This pathway is based, therefore, on the need to provide an ample supply of "thought processes" and "know-how" to the student, so that he/she acquires more skills and knowledge in dealing with labor problems that await him (Hongboontri & Keawkhong, 2014).

For the school it is important to carefully consider who are its "customers". In the first place the students, as users of the service and after their families, then the labor market and society as consumers of skills. In this context, teachers and administrative staff can be considered as "clients" when they benefit from the tools and facilities made available to them and to support and make more effective their activities.

Against this background, the "product" is connected to the dimensions of competence concept i.e. knowledge, know-how (practical application of knowledge) and know how to develop personal characteristics and behavioral aspects. The educational activity is asked to reflect on its "product" considering the centrality of the customer, this leads to reconsider the educational offer in relation to the needs of its "customers" and to seek the satisfaction of their expectations.

The project in question cannot have deadlines, in the sense that the school must always continue to review its services to respond effectively to new user requirements, establishing the logic of continuous improvement (Lieto, 2002).

To develop an approach to quality and activate planning and control mechanisms within school organizations, that lead to a better matching of the current needs of society, it must act within each school. Especially today where the educational institution is presented as an organizational system with its own autonomous space in which it moves through the development of internal dynamics and interrelationships with its environment.

The objective is to develop a management dimension within the institution, so as to develop the ability to efficiently and effectively control of service area, entrusted to it.

Effectiveness, efficiency, functionality and quality have become popular buzzwords to describe external expectations towards public administration in general. Specifically, in order to adequately respond to external requests, schools should seek to develop capacities to delineate adequate and systematic offer plans and individual work must be accompanied by moments of collegiate design (Lovat & Toomey, 2009).

It is the discrepancy between actual results and expected results to provide data on which to base the analysis process and evaluate the causes of deviations and possible new definition of objectives and means of action. After the identification of the critical factors of quality on which to intervene, it is appropriate to define verification tools (satisfaction questionnaires, analysis of complaints, internal audits, etc.) in order to be able to outline corrective, preventive or improvement actions to facilitate a greater "customer" satisfaction.

In this framework, it can define a quality strategy of the institution. This allows it to outline a system of quality management, which is a set of items (resources, responsibilities, activities, etc.) that are put in place to achieve quality objectives that the organization has been given.

These are goals that, on an internal level, pursue continuous improvements in its work, while, on the outside, they look for an appropriate level of reliability (i.e. ability to ensure consistent quality levels over time).

Any quality program requires, however, in the first place, the staunch support of senior management. After that, the aspects on which to operate are as follows:

- try to implement the concept and the requirement of quality within the school; For this purpose educational initiatives could be expected, managers and teachers to introduce the principles and methods of quality, secondly, to create the conditions for organizational development of the school, in order to achieve specific goals that each institution is given as part of its cultural and management autonomy; the objective is, therefore, to seek continuous improvement in the quality of the education service and in close connection, increase its professional and organizational reliability;
- optimize internal communication and external communication;
- assessments of possible innovations in terms of the educational offer, which, for example, on the basis of some experience in schools, may relate to the area of self-learning, where students can access with the support of teachers who gradually provide personalized courses of study through the integration of several media;

- testing of tools to monitor the perception of students about teaching and, more generally, about the whole school, from which to draw reflection elements to assess any action to be taken;
- promote intervention projects that are realistic, aimed at improving the quality, shared, consistent with the expected school model;
- creation of a network between different educational institutions to promote the development of quality programs; initiative that could affect several schools that lead to actions in parallel within their own context, customizing the program, monitoring and discussing the results online.

It is important to try to organize synergistic cooperation, both within the same educational institution between professionals and operational areas and between different educational institutions to promote the discussion and the sharing of good practice and, finally, with the reality of the world of work to bring the same to the school.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the school the quality issues arise at a time of great change and they push the school to seek a new identity, with respect to which the institutional changes can open significant potentialities.

What seems important to highlight is that, addressing the quality issues implies the definition of innovative proposals that affect not only the educational dimension, but also the organizational aspects of the school as a whole.

Through a correct approach to quality management systems, the school may, as indicated, innovate in order to identify its strengths and weaknesses, and thanks to its efforts to obtain important external recognition.

Quality service will provide students with an "extra card", which they can use to enter in the world of work, and it will help to give a better answer to student's issues.

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